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ABSTRACT

The Emmett Till murder case in 1955 marked the turning point in the coverage of blacks by the white American press. Till, a black teenager from Chicago, was murdered in 1955 while visiting relatives in Mississippi. The Till murder was covered extensively in the press, since the two white men charged with killing him were acquitted by an all-white, all-male jury on murder charges and later that year were found innocent by a 20-man all-white grand jury on kidnapping charges. At first, most Southern papers denounced Till's murder, but as the Northern white and black presses began investigating the case, anti-black backlash erupted in Southern publications. Vehement criticism of the South came from "The Crisis," published by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and other black publications followed suit. Editorials appearing in "Life" magazine and the "New York Times" were extremely wounding to Southern pride, and the Southern press retaliated. This media "civil war" continued for about a year after the Till case, raising the question of how to handle race-related news in the news media. By 1960, observers and the press itself agreed that coverage of blacks had improved in both the Northern and Southern press. The Till case gave America a harsh, inescapable glimpse of racial violence and injustice. Even so, problems in the press coverage of minority groups persist, and the task begun more than 30 years ago remains to be completed. (Sixty-three references are included.) (AEW)

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Racial Coverage of the 1950s Print Media and the Case of Emmett Till

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Background

In the summer of 1917, a group of white men fired shots into the homes of black residents in East St. Louis, Ill. When the black homeowners retaliated the same night with their own guns, two local police were caught in the crossfire and killed. A day later, the local press had helped to turn the incident into one of the midwest's bloodiest race riots in the early decades of the century, with over 100 black persons dead and thousands of dollars in property damage the result. The St. Louis Republic charged that the black persons involved had pre-arranged the police officer's killings, and later it headlined the blacks' defeat. The paper ran a front page banner headline in the riot's aftermath, announcing "25,000 Whites Were Doomed in Negro Murder Plot." While taking a less sensational tact, another paper, the East St. Louis Daily Journal was also found to have exaggerated and distorted the facts about the disorder, significantly contributing to the open hostility against blacks prevalent at the time.1

The St. Louis example is typical of the way the nation's print media covered black Americans and racial problems during the first half of this century. Wilson and Gutierrez refer to this as the confrontational phase in the development of ethnic minority's relationship to the white news media.2

Beaseley found that even during the height of muckraking at the beginning of the 1900s, the rash of lynchings and related racial crisis that followed Reconstruction went virtually unnoticed by the press. A study of the press handling of the 1931 Scottsboro rape cases, in which nine black youths were wrongly sentenced to death in Alabama's courts, found the story had received only moderate coverage, with some media ignoring the case altogether, and others providing inflammatory coverage.3 Others have noted that several studies have documented the failings of the press in covering black Americans.4

The following analysis offers evidence that it would not be until the year 1955 that the American print media would recognize the presence of its black citizens, and begin to go beyond stereotypes and convention to depict them and their social condition. And even then, it would take the senseless murder of a 14-year-old black youth, Emmett Till, to prick the nation's conscience.

There have been a handful of studies investigating press coverage of blacks during the 1950s. Most suggest a "revolution" in the civil rights arena during that decade as being the turning point in racial news coverage, whereas others point to the Supreme Court school desegregation decision in 1954 as the benchmark.5 In 1972, a group of black journalists looked back to the year 1955 as the occasion when a major reversal took place in the coverage of blacks by the American press.6 This paper argues that coverage of the

Emmett Till case in 1955 was the pivotal point for this reversal.

In the mid-fifties, Simeon Booker, a black journalist and former Nieman Fellow, noted that America's daily newspapers consistently ignored the black community, emphasizing crime news about blacks and running scant entertainment, sports, social, civic or business coverage. According to Booker, blacks had become the country's worst newspaper audience because "Negroes cannot gain the happy feeling of belonging, that dash of dignity, or a degree of self-respect" from white oriented publications.7

If coverage of blacks was an example of benign neglect in the North, a precise set of norms were employed by southern newspapers to reinforce that region's segregation of the races. "The Southern newspaper constitutes the greatest single force in perpetuating the popular stereotype of the Negro," a Southern Regional Council study in the late forties concluded, said Armistead S. Pride in 1974. Pride was a black newsman who later became chairman of Lincoln University's School of Journalism. Daily and weekly newspapers below the Mason-Dixon line during the fifties were controlled by journalists trained in the thirties and forties, and they had retained negative attitudes regarding how blacks should be treated in print, added Pride.8

One small-town white Mississippi editor, who considered himself liberal on race issues, would outline in 1967 the five canons of southern journalism: the use of a Negro tag in

any article concerning blacks; use of the "descriptive" term colored; segregation of people in columns by race; listings of local services such as hospitals and government facilities under white and colored categories; and the omission of the courtesy titles Mr., Mrs. or Miss when referring to blacks. In addition, he explained that "nigger stories" - items of black-on-black crime or crimes perpetrated against blacks by whites, automatically went to the newspaper's back pages, if carried at all. On the other hand, stories of black crimes against whites were a front page item. And the use of photographs of blacks was a standard taboo.9

During the forties and fifties, the Carthaginian, a weekly newspaper published in central Mississippi, like many of its counterparts across the South, carried items about local blacks under the heading "With Our Colored Readers" and occasionally ran a column titled "Negro Home Agent's Notes". Black persons were identified as colored or negro, usually lower case, and no courtesy titles were used except the curious practice of identifying black male teachers as "Prof." A study of the paper, published in 1975, pointed out that the Carthaginian faithfully reflected the South's social structure, and this pattern did not change in its pages until the 1950s came to a close.10

The Southern Regional Council report discussed by Pride found some improvement in the treatment of blacks in southern newspapers when comparing the end of the 1940s to the previous 10 years. The Council admitted, however, that

progress was relative to the past, and news discrimination persisted as most southern editors chose to continue projecting stereotyped images of blacks rather than to take the financial and social risks of portraying blacks in a more accurate light.11

The Role of the Black Press

For these reasons the black press remained the only vehicle for true-to-life representation of the black community. Following the example of the short-lived Freedom's Journal, the nation's first black newspaper founded in 1827, the black press had served the dual role of informing the black populace about its own activities and affairs, and as an organ of protest, with its ultimate goal to obtain equality for blacks in the mainstream of American society.12 Maxwell Brookes, in a study for the University of Chicago, characterized the black press as providing supplemental news of special interest to blacks, rather than serving as a primary news source.13 Widespread criticism of the black press during the fifties, and a concurrent decline in circulation, led Brooks to examine its role in 1959.

Several authors during the fifties suggested that by acting as a protest press, the black newspapers and magazines overemphasized the negative aspects of race relations and underplayed the positive.14 On one hand, the southern black press in particular was accused of being too soft on racial

issues, but on the other hand the black press was accused of leftist or communist sympathies in an era heated by the McCarthy-influenced red-baiting of journalists.15

Brooks found in a content analysis of five Negro newspapers of the fifties that they generally reflected American mores and traditions, and acted more as journals of reform rather than papers advocating protest. 16 Others took a critical stance, including black sociologist E. Franklin Frazier who in 1957 charged that the black press was pandering to a black middle-class dreamworld.17 One researcher found that Ebony gave limited space to race related stories and segregated them in the magazine prior to the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Another study suggested that Life magazine provided more pictorial coverage of the civil rights movement than did Ebony between 1955 and 1965.18

Regardless of the black press' ideology, a combination of factors including competition from magazines such as Jet and Ebony, competition from white-owned metropolitan dailies, and the growth of small local black papers, began to cut deeply into the circulation of the larger metropolitan papers by the late 1950s.19 One historian noted that the 1950s was a "time of silence" for the black press across the south, especially in Mississipi. The black press of this period became squeezed between pressure from the black community, from the majority community and its culture, and from the dominant white press.20

The Brown Decision and its aftermath

At the same time that the black press was in flux, the nation was undergoing a dramatic upheaval in the social and political status of black Americans both in the North and South. In the mid-fifties, the northern white-owned press picked up some of the slack left by the black press and began to report on these events. One of the biggest stories of this era was the 1954 Supreme Court ruling which rendered school segregation unconstitutional. Historian Benjamin Muse noted that this ruling spurred a rash of sometimes violent southern backlash which he called "Negrophobia".21 One of several incidents resulting from this backlash was the murder of Emmett Till a year later. The Till story, which was reported heavily by both the print and broadcast media, was particularly significant because unlike the Supreme Court story which involved the nation's highest-ranking judiciary, the Till case concerned an otherwise unknown black individual, and it graphically detailed the harsh realities of black life in the South.

Emmett Louis Till, a black teenager from Chicago, was spending the summer of 1955 visiting a relative in the hamlet of Money, Miss. On the evening of August 25, Till allegedly entered a store owned by Roy Bryant, bought two-cents worth of bubble gum, and by varying accounts uttered a wolf-whistle or lewd comment toward Mrs. Bryant when leaving the store. Three days later, he was dragged by gunpoint by two white men

from the home of his uncle, and his beaten body was found a week later nude in the Tallahatchie River, with a bullet hole in the head.

Roy Bryant and J. W. Milam were subsequently arrested and indicted by a grand jury for the murder of Till. A month later, however, they were acquitted by an all-white, all-male jury. Although state prosecutors attempted to have the pair tried on kidnapping charges, they were found innocent again by a 20-man, all-white grand jury in November of that year.

The Emmett Till case gained widespread coverage in the domestic print media. A review of the Readers Guide to Periodical Literature and several newspaper indexes showed a greater number of articles concentrating on this case and its aftermath, than any single subject involving a black person in the previous five years. Given the scant coverage of blacks in the national press prior to 1950 it seems that the Till case represented a watershed.

Warren Breed, a southern journalist and sociologist at Tulane University, noted the significance of the press' reaction to Till case, and in 1958 published a study of newspaper handling of the story.22 Breed did a content analysis to examine if there were differences in the coverage of the case between northern and southern newspapers, and between black and white publications. Working with the hypothesis that the press will tend to be objective although papers will stress different themes, he used seven symbols as indicators of bias and tabulated their occurance in eleven

newspapers. Breed defined objectivity as reporting "the available facts as given, without prevarication".23

Breed concluded that with one exception, a small Mississippi daily, the press treated the subject with "objectivity". He found that the one Mississippi paper that deviated from this trend engaged in a "kind of nativistic movement" to defend itself and the South from outside criticism. The two black weeklies Breed examined followed the expected role of protesting the Till murder, and the larger white dailies studied used the case to make larger statements about societal values such as "justice" and "equality".24

The lack of significant differences between northern and southern dailies in Breed's study was attributed to the fact that both received and used wire service copy on important stories. However, I would suggest that the input of generally uniform material did not necessarily create uniform and "objective" news coverage. Papers could still generate biased messages through placement of articles, headlines, selective editing of portions of the stories, or rearrangement of the facts. It is difficult to determine how generalizeable Breed's results are to the fifties press because he used a relatively small sample of 11 newspapers, and because he reviewed papers during two 15-day periods which he considered to be of "greatest activity and interest", although media coverage of the case stretched on for more than a year.25

Breed also found, in a qualitative content analysis of

the same sample, that all the papers studied considered the Till case big news, and that clear North-South differences were present: northern papers were more likely to "personalize" Negroes than southern papers, and black weeklies selectively highlighted the violence and injustice of the case, but not on what Breed claimed was "Till's provocation for the killing".26

Hindsight would show that perhaps the greatest problem with Breed's analysis, which he acknowledged, is the objectivity indicator. In the first half of this century, the press seized upon objectivity as an ideal to distance itself from the period of "yellow journalism". In 1946, The Commission on Freedom of the Press called for the press to "provide a truthful, comprehensive, intelligent account of the day's events in a context which gives them meaning" while making sure to separate fact from opinion.27 This principle was taken for granted by fifties journalists. But by the 1970s, the press and the nation as a whole would decide that the concept of objectivity was a goal toward which the press might strive, rather than an a tangible characteristic that can measured.28

Southern Papers and the Till Case

Several sources, like Ira Harkey, editor of the Pasceoula Times in Mississippi, said that while most southern papers at first denounced Till's murder in their editorial pages, giving the story significant and often fair reporting. But as the northern white and black presses began investigating the case, substantial anti-black backlash erupted in print.29 Some of the southern press backlash came in direct response to comments in black publications, which were predictably angry and accusatory in tone. "Lynching may be the work of a small lunatic fringe, but responsible elements have failed to curb this fringe", charged Marguerite Cartwright in the Negro History Bulletin.30 Some of the most vehement criticism of Mississippi and the South came from The Crisis, published by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Crediting the state with holding a 71-year American lynching record, The Crisis labeled Till's murder "an act of vengeance" and added "the white people of Mississippi are directly responsible for this hideous crime."32 Other black publications, such as the Chicago Defender, a weekly newspaper, and Ebony magazine, took a less militant stance but devoted considerable space to the murder and subsequent trial under headlines like "Negro Child Murdered in Mississippi" and "Land of the Till Murder."

Members of the southern press retaliated with similar invectives. The "...prejudiced communistic inspired NAACP

organization will make little headway in their efforts to blacken the name of the great sovereign state of Mississippi, regardless of their claims of Negro haters, lynching, or whatever", proclaimed the Picayune, Miss. Item.32 "It is entirely possible that this Negro boy from Chicago was inspired by NAACP statements to 'show-off' while he was in Mississippi on a visit", suggested the Kosciusko Star-Herald.33 The Jackson Daily News which was notorious for its pro-segregation position, played up several stories of a murder in Harlem allegedly committed by four Negro youths, arguing that the NAACP and other civil rights groups chose to ignore the incident and pick on the South instead. This argument would be echoed later in the debate.

Some southern publications did struggle to hold the line at straight news coverage of the Till case, as Breed found, with two notable examples, the Mississippi Delta Democrat-Times edited by Hodding Carter, and the Atlanta Constitution edited by Ralph McGill. One of the most widely quoted southern condemnations of the murder was a signed editorial by Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist William Faulkner in the Democrat-Times. "Perhaps the purpose of this sorry and tragic error committed in my native Mississippi by two white adults on an afflicted Negro child is to prove to us whether or not we deserve to survive," he said.34

Enter the Northern Press

The denunciation of Till's murder went much further than the pages of a few southern newspapers and the black press, a factor which makes this case so consequential. Two of the nation's most widely read publications, Life magazine and the New York Times devoted considerable space to the subject as a news story. But their editorials were perhaps the most wounding to southern pride.

"In Mississippi the murder of 14-year-old Emmett Till goes unpunished. It will be punished, nevertheless, for there is a higher law than Mississippi's...Those who condone a deed so foul as this are in danger of losing their souls...Sleep well, Emmett Till; you will be avenged. You will also be remembered, as long as men have tongues to cry against evil", said Life in a rare and emotional pronouncement.35

The Times was more reserved in its comments, stating that while "Mississippi stood at the head of the shameful list of the states in which lynching occurred", the actions of the grand jury in indicting Milam and Bryant should be congratulated.36 The Times obviously considered the Till trial a major news item, carrying over 50 articles on the subject between September 1955 and February 1956. The paper's management left the commentary to staff writer John N. Popham, who followed the case for months and wrote several interpretive pieces on the trial and on race relations in the South.37

Popham wrote that the "sordid" Till murder case was crucial because it focused for the first time national attention on racial discrimination in the South. "The reactions to Till's murder reveals the wretched feelings of Mississippi. The picture is one of white supremacy that skates the thin ice separating it from white tyranny", he said in the Sunday edition shortly after the indictments.38

Newsweek carried a series of articles, beginning with the Till funeral in Chicago and the response of that city's black community, and ending weeks later with an in-depth account of the trial and acquittal which filled more than a page including photographs. Time, Look, and the generally conservative U.S. News and World Report followed suit with pages of reportage on the trial and efforts to provide some background on the South to put the case in perspective.

John Keats, a reporter for a Washington, D.C. newspaper at the time, would later recall that he and his colleagues had to convince the news editor there of the significance of the Till trial and related issues. As the press around the nation ground out the story, Keats said "Washington had been a sleepy southern town until the New Deal, and our editor was a prisoner of his own generation".39 The paper eventually sent a reporter to cover the trial.

Black publications were also in evidence at this landmark case, including the Baltimore Afro-American, the Chicago Defender, both weekly newspapers, and a team from Ebony-Jet. Simeon Booker, a black reporter assigned to the

story by Jet, recounted tales of the cooperation between three white newsmen from the Memphis Press-Scimter and the Jackson Daily News, and black reporters, in what he characterized as the most significant development of the trial, which never reached print.40

The reporters attending the trial, held in Sumner, Miss., were forced to adhere to the Jim Crow laws of the community, which segregated black and white journalists.41 Two white reporters defied the warnings of local officials not to mix with the group of black reporters, to tip them off that the trial was fixed and only two witnesses were ready to testify for the prosecution. During a night-long manhunt, the black reporters and local civil rights leaders took on the job of tracking down three additional witnesses who had been frightened into hiding. The three white reporters agreed to contact state officials and the prosecuting attorney about the new witnesses in exchange for getting first crack at this new slant for their papers. The exchange went smoothly, the witnesses testified, and the two southern papers had aided the trial while "scooping" the competition. To Booker's dismay, however, although the new witnesses made the headlines, the account of the manhunt and the labors of the black reporters went untold.41

Other national publications, particularly politically left journals, provided commentary on the Till murder. They included The New Republic, The Nation, the Catholic monthly Commonweal, and the journal of the Communist Party, Political

Affairs, which was the only publication to predict the importance of the Till case to the burgeoning Civil Rights movement.42

By the time the trial was over, a raging debate among the press was underway, not only on the merits of the Mississippi criminal justice system or racism in the South, but on how to handle race relations as a news item. By the following Spring, Newsweek termed the phenomenon an "Invasion of the South", citing a general uneasiness among southern editors to discuss the issue, although they seemed to welcome or decry the appearance of the national press attention in about equal numbers.43

Estimating that as many as 75 reporters were on hand for the Till trial, with the flood spilling over to cover other events such as the Montgomery, Ala. bus boycott, the weekly newsmagazine said even staunch segregationists like T.R. Waring, editor of the Charleston News and Courier, believed it was important for northern readers to learn more about the South.44

The northern press received its share of backlash. A series by New York Post reporter Murray Kempton on the Till case, while winning him a N.Y. Newspaper Guild award, also won him the label of "wild-eyed bleeding heart with a pulpit under his arm" by some southern journalists.45 Grover C. Hall, Jr., editor-in-chief of the Montgomery Advertiser, berated his colleagues in the Bulletin of the American Society of Newspaper Editors for "turning out bubbly stereo-

plates about the part of the race problem under the magnolia."46

Hall was on of the first to revive this argument, saying the northern press was doing an injustice to the South and to the race issue by unfairly pointing a finger at the southern press while ignoring problems in its own backyard. Maintaining that racial disharmony in the North was a much larger issue, he said "...the race problem cannot be acted upon until the U.S. press at least locates the problem on the map."47

William Faulkner arrived on the scene again in a piece titled "Letter to the North" published in Life, which maintained that the Northerners and liberals had a biased image of the South, aided by what had recently been written in the press. The novelist used his reputation and eloquent writing style to plead the South's case, stating that while he was against racial inequality, moderation was the only course for civil rights since outsiders would never be able to force integration in the South.48

However, South Carolina editor Waring managed to reinforce the Northerner's view of the South as a hotbed of racial intolerance with his article "The Southern Case Against Desegregation" published in the February 1956 issue of Harpers magazine. Among other points, he argued that blacks were less careful with their health and cleanliness than whites; that the home environment for black children was far below the standards of whites; that many black couples

never bothered to marry and created an epidemic of illegitimate black children; that crime was more prevalent among blacks; and that southern blacks were usually well below the intellectual level of their white neighbors.49

"Some advocates of integration say the way to cure these differences is to let the children mingle so that the Negroes will learn from the whites. The trouble with this theory is that even if it works, a single generation of white children will bear the brunt of the load...Negro culture will also rub off onto the whites," stated one of the South's most influential journalists.50

The editors of Harpers were quick to disassociate themselves from Waring's comments, explaining that the article was published to help the rest of the nation "understand the state of mind he represents" in the South. In addition, Harpers countered that while white southerners complained of their treatment in the press, they in turn were reluctant to understand public opinion in the North, acknowledge the rights of blacks, or admit that outside pressure would be essential to create changes in the social structure.51

During the same month in 1956, U.S. News and World Report interviewed the editors of several southern newspapers concerning their views on the changing racial climate there. Tuscaloosa News publisher Buford Boone, Nashville Banner head James Stahlman, Waring and Hall all agreed that conditions had worsened in the South since the Supreme Court ruling, and

all predicted some forms of violence would continue in their states. The group blamed outside intruders for their troubles.52

The Southern Press evaluates its performance

Some southern journalists, however, were beginning to agree that the South's handling of racial issues in print was inadequate and frequently inflammatory, and they began suggesting reforms. It would take until the end of the decade for many to get enough distance from the debate to observe what was happening. At a meeting of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, C.A. McKnight, who later became editor of the Charlotte Observer, admitted that civil rights had not been adequately covered in the southern press, and that this minimal coverage was often unbalanced and distorted.53

Some soul searching by the southern press had begun. Even those editors who so strongly defended themselves in earlier debates, looked back on their coverage of the racial turmoil with new insight. Several years later, Buford Boone would note that in the mid-fifties, it was difficult for journalists in the South to remain impartial to the issues around them because they were undergoing the same emotional reactions as the larger white population.54

"The failure of the southern press was in the particularly human desire not to alienate and not be totally

alienated from the small community in which one lives," explained Hodding Carter, almost a decade after the Till case. Carter said those editors who thought they could supress the racial revolution by ignoring it only fooled themselves, and those papers who struck to reporting "only the facts" failed to get at the roots of the South's problems.55

Under the auspices of the Southern Regional Council, another study was undertaken in 1960 by Sylvan Meyer, editor of the Gainesvill, Ga. Daily Times, to assess the South's performance in the second half of the fifties. He concluded that the "race news" play of the period reflected the uneasiness of the southern journalists, who took refuge in "textbook journalism" when reporting on events. Meyer highlighted errors of omission, commission, and language which prevented adequate coverage of blacks and race relations, and helped to perpetuate sterotypes.56

Changes in racial news coverage

Just a year after the Till case, the question of how to handle race-related news became an active topic of discussion in the news media. Time reported that thoughtful editors around the country were dropping the automatic labeling of blacks in print and were developing more consistent and fair modes for covering news in the black community. Time added that newspapers were running far more news than ever before

about black people.57

A. H. Sulzberger, former publisher of the New York Times, went on record as stating that the press must be used to help win civil rights for black citizens, and should "report, interpret and discuss the facts and attitudes involved in race relations." Sulzberger laid down new rules at the Times that required writers and editors not to use the Negro tag in a crime story unless the description of the individual was important. He also advocated providing black leaders with an wider audience through the press.58

On the heels of the Times' coverage of the Till case in 1955, the paper embarked on a major, five-week project using a team of ten reporters to produce a special "Report on the South" which appeared in March 1956. It sold 700,000 copies, the largest sale of any single weekday issue in the newspaper's history.59 A host of similar articles appeared after the Times' project, including a five-part series on the South in Life.

Conclusions

By the close of the decade, observers of the press and the press itself agreed that coverage of blacks had improved both in the North and South.60 Many of the old norms had

been discarded in response to pressure groups and experience. There was no doubt that news about the racial conflict of the fifties sold newspapers and magazines. The American public wanted to know more about what was happening across the country and in their own communities, and black civil rights activists were beginning to recognize the press as a vehicle for gaining national visibility.

But changes must be viewed in their context. One recent study of Life magazine's coverage of black and white Americans found that portrayal of blacks in daily life remained consistently low between 1937 and 1972 -- just .1 percent of the total magazine at its highest point.61 In comparison to 1950, the coverage of blacks by the end of that decade was certainly improved, but in the 1960s racial unrest would continue to grow and explode in violent episodes around the nation. Civil rights leader Charles Evers would say in the mid-sixties that "the press has been and is one of the worst enemies, along with the police, that the Negro has in Mississippi."62 In 1968 the Kerner Commission would deliver the dismal news that the press had failed to adequately report on race relations, and that the white press was mistrusted and held in contempt by many black Americans.63

The emergence of the civil rights movement during the 1950s was paralleled by the northern white press providing increased coverage of the black community and race-related events, and the southern press beginning to examine its practices of racial coverage. The Till case was a pivotal

point in these changes because it prompted constant and extensive press coverage of Till's death and the subsequent murder trial, in the process giving Americans a harsh, inescapable glimpse of racial violence and injustice.

This study emphasizes the need for continued research on the complex relationship between the news media and problems of race in our society. Quantitative analysis is needed to determine how and in what publications these changes occurred. Parallel research is also needed on the role the newly emerging broadcast media had during this period. The gradually heightened consciousness of the press during the fifties did serve to enlighten and inform the public, which contributed to the substantial gains made by blacks in education, employment and other areas. But just as racial discrimination persists today, so do problems in the press coverage of minority groups. The task begun more than 30 years ago remains to be completed.

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25 Breed's findings could be interpreted as implying that most Southern papers covered the case objectively, since only one (or 9 percent) of the total sample was found deviant. Or they could be interpreted that as many as 50 percent of the Southern press would likely provide biased coverage. Breed doesn't indicate in his report whether this was to be a purposive sample, although given the wide range of responses to the story among the southern press, it seems unlikely that generalizations could be made with such a small sample (two newspapers).

26 Ibid.

27 Theodore Peterson, "The Social Responsibility Theory", in Four Theories of the Press, Fred Siebert, Theodore Peterson and Wilbur Schramm eds., (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1976) p. 87; also Walter M. Brasch and Dana R. Ulloth, The Press and the State, (Lanham, MD.: University Press of America, 1986) p. 254.

28 Ernest C. Hynds, American Newspapers in the 1980s, (New York: Hastings House, 1980) p. 172; also consider sociological discussions of the context of news values such as in Gaye Tuchman, Making News: A Study in the Construction of Reality, (New York: Free Press, 1978).

29 Ira Harkey, The Smell of Burning Crosses.

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